

# Frequently Asked Questions

March, 2002

## General Questions

**Q: What are the pieces of the State grant program, and how will the \$25.0 million appropriated for this program be spent?**

**A:** Grant guidance was developed over the summer time frame in consultation with State and Tribal Partners. EPA announced the solicitation for applications for this program in early February and proposals are due April 1.

The State grant program is to help EPA, States and other partner's exchange environmental information and use consistent data. It will focus on data standards, integration, and exchange technology. While not focused on any specific environmental program, the availability of both State and EPA data on the network will both facilitate understanding of various environmental issues, and serve as a precursor to understanding what data needs exist in order to more fully understand environmental conditions. EPA envisions that this grant program will need multiple year funding to accomplish the implementation of the Exchange Network.

The Network Grant Program has four main parts which are: 1) Network One Stop Grants; 2) Network Readiness Grants; 3) Network Challenge Grants; and 4) Network Administration Grants.

- Network One Stop Grants will be built upon the foundation the One Stop Program, helped to create. States and Tribes that have done some strategic planning concerning how they might participate in the Exchange network and who have not received a One Stop Grant would be eligible to receive funding.
- Network Readiness Grants will enhance State and Tribal capacity and foster network participation (e.g., development of a node, assignment of data stewardship roles and responsibility, establishment of trading partner agreements, and internal data clean up).
- Network Challenge Grants will be available to any group of eligible applicants to work collaboratively on a project that will be advancing the Exchange Network. Projects should demonstrate how they will produce a higher level of quality data, reduce reporting burden, and provide public access to the data.
- Network Administration Grants will be announced this summer. These grants are to support State/Tribal technical and administrative functions of the Network.

**Q: How much of the funding is set-aside for Tribes?**

**A:** \$2.5 million

**Q: How many States will be on line as a result of receiving this grant funding?**

**A:** The original projection of 15 states being on-line with Central Data Exchange was exceeded in FY 2001 to a projection of 34 States using CDX to report data to EPA across various program areas in FY 2002. . The \$25 million for the NEIEN Grant Program has three broad components for which any of the 34 States would apply and potentially receive a portion of the funding.

**Q: What is a Network Node?**

**A:** The hardware and software used to exchange environmental information on the Network, using a standard protocol and appropriate security measures to issue and respond to authorized requests for specific information. It is an environmental information Web service that processes authorized queries and sends the requested information in an XML (Extensible Mark-up Language)

**Q: Can States provide award grant funds to an EPA Regional Office for support?**

**A:** No, State and Tribal assistance funds must be used for the benefit of States and Tribes.

**Q: Is a Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) required?**

**A:** Yes, a QAP is required for new data flows. If a QAP exists for data flows being proposed with the application, a copy of this plan must be referenced in the proposal as on file, approved by the State, and will be provided upon request.

**Q: What if a QAP does not exist for current or new data flows within the State or Tribe?**

**A:** If a QAP does not exist, recipients must work with the respective EPA Regional or HQ Project Officer, as well as the EPA Regional or HQ Quality Assurance Manager, to develop and implement a QAP that is acceptable to all parties before funds can be released.

**Q: What is the project period and budget period for each category of grants?**

**A:** The project period and budget period will be negotiated with each applicant based on the proposal submitted for Challenge and One Stop awards. The project period for Readiness Grants should coincide with the three - year transition plan. The budget period can not be extended past five years.

**Q: Should letters of support from the State Environmental Commissioner, Governor or Tribal Leader be included with all proposals?**

**A:** While letters of support are not a requirement to receive funding for a Readiness or Challenge grant, including letters with the proposal would further

demonstrate the support of Senior Leadership for the proposed project.

To receive a Network One Stop grant, the proposal must demonstrate that a Senior State/Tribal Leader (Deputy commissioner, Commissioner, Chief Information Officer, Governor, and Tribal equivalent) support the plans and activities.

**Q: Can grant funds awarded be used to hire temporary employees to support the project?**

**A:** Yes

**Q: Should I include the summary of the cost on the budget form SF424A and also reference these costs in the proposal?**

**A:** While it is not required that you reference the budget in your proposal, this type of information would be helpful in reviewing the proposals.

### Specific Network One-Stop Questions

**Q: Is the State grant program in addition to the One Stop program?**

**A:** No. However, the basic component of the Exchange Network grant program will be built upon the foundation the One Stop Program helped to create.

**Q: What is the 120-day plan?**

**A:** A state or tribal grant proposal must specify a commitment to produce a three- to five-year state plan. Most states refer to this as a 120-Day Plan, since each state awarded a grant is required to submit the plan 120 days following their baseline visit. (The baseline visit is an on-site visit by EPA information technology staff and consultants that gives the states' leadership a snapshot of their agency's information management opportunities and challenges).

### Specific Network Readiness Questions

**Q: Are grant proposals limited to addressing data flow identified on the EPA's Central Data Exchange (CDX) priority list?**

**A:** Ideally, the State/Tribal three-year transition plan would align with CDX data flow priorities. Grant proposals are not restricted to proposed CDX data flows, but applicants are strongly encouraged to align their proposal with EPA's proposed schedule. For the most current information on CDX flow priorities and status, please refer to the CDX web site: <http://www.epa.gov/cdx/priority.html>.

**Q: Can a Network Node be developed within just one department using one source of data (i.e, Air, Water, Waste)?**

**A:** At least one source of data in a mature stage of production that is used for agency business and that would likely be used within the Network is originally

envisioned. However, longer term use would ultimately include all environmental program data for exchange.

**Q: What should the 3-year transition plan include for Readiness Grants?**

**A:** Applicants should produce a comprehensive three-year plan that addresses critical steps and milestones that will demonstrate their commitment to participate on the Network. The plan should clearly identify what you expect to accomplish each year of the project, what project support is required and what is currently available. If you have an integrated facility system, then you should include the facility steward and the current quality of the data. If you do not have an integrated facility system, your plan should address when/how you plan to integrate this data and address how you currently share facility information between your programs.

### **Specific Network Challenge Questions**

**Q: Can grant award funds be distributed directly to individual States involved in a joint Challenge proposal?**

**A:** Funds can be awarded to individual States. However, to ensure success of the joint project, the Lead State Agency submitting the proposal must be responsible for ensuring that each State completes the work identified in the work plan submitted with the proposal.

**Q: How can I find out what Challenge Grants are being considered for proposal so my State or Tribe would have the opportunity to participate?**

**A:** The Environmental Council of States has posted potential Challenge Grants projects to their WISER web site. You may also contact the EPA HQ point of contact.

**Q: The grant guidance states that States who submit a Challenge Grant proposal may receive a maximum of \$1,000,000. Should I write the proposal for over \$1,000,000 in the event additional funding becomes available?**

**A:** Applicants must produce a comprehensive proposal that addresses the critical steps and milestones for the project that will be undertaken and demonstrate commitment to actual development of the project. If the project would exceed \$1,000,000 for development, the proposal should address what milestones will be reached with the maximum funding and what could be accomplished with additional funding, if available.

**Q: What happens if States submit similar proposals that could be combined into a joint project?**

**A:** The EPA panel will review and evaluate each proposal on their potential to make a contribution to nationwide Network capacity. If similar proposals are submitted that could be combined into a joint project that would advance the functionality of the network, EPA will work with the applicants to combine into a joint

project.